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CHRISTIANITY AND WAR

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EXPLANATORY NOTE

GREAT BRITAIN is engaged in a war from which, as we believe, there was offered to our nation no honourable way of escape. The desire of all who love their country is to serve it in the hour of its need, and so to live and labour that those who have fallen in its service may not have died in vain. While this may suffice to make immediate duty clear, the war remains in the deepest sense a challenge to Christian thought. The present bitter struggle between nations which for centuries have borne the Christian name indicates some deep-seated failure to understand the principles of Christ and to apply them to human affairs.

This series of papers embodies an attempt to reach, by common thought, discussion and prayer, a truer understanding of the meaning of Christianity and of the mission of the Church to the individual, to society and to the world.

Those who are promoting the issue of these papers are drawn from different political parties and different Christian bodies. They believe that the truth they seek can be attained only by providing for a measure of diversity in expression. Therefore they do not accept responsibility for the opinions of any paper taken alone. But in spirit they are united, for they are one in the conviction that in Christ and in His Gospel lies the hope of redemption and health for society and for national life.



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In a world gone pagan, what is a Christian to do? For the world is gone pagan. Members of the body of Christ are tearing one another, and His body is bleeding as it once bled on Calvary, but this time the wounds are dealt by His friends. It is as though Peter were driving home the nails, and John were piercing the

side, as I at least read the story, this nation was right to declare war, and those who are fighting at her call are fighting for a just cause, which there was, at that time, no way of serving except the soldier's way.

Here is ground enough for perplexity. And the critics are ready enough to say that Christianity has broken down, its bankruptcy stands confessed. But we can at least answer that. This war, far from representing the bankruptcy of Christianity, really represents a great advance in its conquest of the world; for it is the first war of which many people have said that it marks the collapse of our religion. In other words, it is only now that Europe has found out again that if nations were Christian there would be no war. That was known well enough to Athanasius and Tertullian and the primitive Church; but from the time of Constantine till now, it has been

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forgotten. When the world took the Church under its protection, and largely under its control, in the event known as Constantine's conversion, many of the principles of the Gospel were obscured. For centuries the Church was ready to bless armies and armadas. Shakespeare finds it appropriate to make bishops prominent among those who advise Henry V to declare war on France. But in our day a Pope, when besought to bless arms, is reported to have answered, 'I give my benediction to peace'; and an archbishop—*alterius orbis papa*—solemnly declares all war to be 'devil's work'. We have at least found out—believers and unbelievers alike—that all war is contrary to the mind and spirit of Christ. That is a real gain. Indeed, it is not Christianity that has broken down, for Christianity has never been applied to international relations. What has broken down is a civilization which was not Christian.

But this knowledge involves at once the need of seeking in thought and prayer for further light upon our duty as citizens and Christians—members both of the British nation and of the Christian Church. It is the purpose of this series of papers to offer to all who may find it useful, some guidance for such thought and prayer.

There seem to be three main groups of problems which press urgently upon us:—

1. What line should the Christian take regarding the actual declaration of war, and the call to arms?
2. How should Christians behave in time of war, when it has been declared?

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3. What are the chief questions—theoretical and practical—which demand the attention of Christians in consequence of the war's occurrence ?

It is the business of this first paper to sketch, though in outline only, the lines upon which these inquiries may proceed ; it will be more concerned to bring the problems into clear view than to state solutions ; solutions will be offered in subsequent papers.

I. THE DECLARATION OF WAR AND THE CALL TO ARMS.

On this question there seem to be various attitudes adopted with perfect sincerity by thoughtful Christians : yet all of them give rise to perplexity. We may first consider the position of a man who, sincerely believing that his cause is right, goes not only with resolution but with joy to kill or be killed for it. He need not necessarily argue that because he is right the enemy must be wrong ; for he may have noticed that most tragedy arises from a conflict of one right with another. For him it is enough that his country needs him to support its own righteous cause, and he goes rejoicing to serve. So far as his influence may affect the decision, he may use it in favour of declaring war, because he is sure that no other means can be found to serve the cause in whose justice he firmly believes.

Is he wrong in this ? Has not much of Christian heroism—or at least of the recorded heroism of Christendom—taken this form ? It seems impossible to condemn

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him. And yet there was never so just a cause as that of Christ, for which He would not fight. Is that because His cause was spiritual while the States of this world are material? And if so, how far can the spiritual control the material? Or again, if, in the Kingdom of God, there is no war to give opportunity for the splendid spirit of adventure and duty which makes nearly all our best men eager to be at the front, can it provide other outlets for that fine ardour?

Here are problems enough. Our business at present is only to state them. Suggestions towards a possible answer may be given later on in this paper.

There is, however, another frame of mind; a man may feel that for his nation or for himself circumstances have made war a duty, but it remains an odious duty. There is in it no exhilaration, no exultation in triumph, but a sense of stern obligation. And while, perhaps, this frame of mind does not raise so many questions as the last, we have still to ask whether we can picture Jesus Christ entering into battle or bidding His disciples to do so. Yet is not war a duty in some cases—in this case?

This leads to yet a third attitude of mind, and to the doctrine associated with the Society of Friends and with the great name of Tolstoi. The watchword of this doctrine is 'Non-resistance', 'Resist not evil'. But we must interpret Christ's teaching by His actions. He did not resist physically; but He did resist the evil of His day, even to death. He did not say: 'The people of Jerusalem are very obstinate; here in Galilee are crowds waiting

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eagerly for the Gospel; here then we will work in peace.' On the contrary, 'He set His face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem.' He did not stay out of the fight; He went into it. But He went into it unarmed, and bade Peter put up his sword into its sheath. Is that the true line of action for a Christian nation? What is the 'price of non-resistance'? For assuredly all Friends will agree with us when we say that merely to stand still, while other nations agonize, and while we of necessity appropriate their trade and commerce, is not the way of the Cross. Peace, if it merely means not fighting, may be something even further from the mind of Christ than war.

These perplexities point to one of two conclusions: either the standards of Christ are applicable only to individuals in relation to other individuals, and not to States; or else there is an entanglement of sin, which makes it sometimes impossible to do what alone can truly be called right, so that it is a duty to do what in itself is evil. To these questions we must return.

II. CHRISTIAN CONDUCT IN TIME OF WAR

War is, as a matter of fact, declared; its horror is before us day and night; how then are Christians to behave? 'Love your enemies; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.' It is natural to hate enemies; to believe any evil that is told of them; to desire to retaliate with interest; to pray that evil

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may befall them. Here, as elsewhere, the religion of Christ is the defiance of what—apart from it—seems to be nature.

Let us take instances from present facts. There can, I suppose, be no doubt at all that German soldiers have been guilty of atrocities; a large part of the Press, however, has seemed to delight in collecting stories of such, with the sole object (apparently) of gratifying and thereby intensifying the lust of hate. Let truth be told by all means; let nothing except proven truth be told against our enemies.

The Christian can never desire to take reprisals. He knows that 'an eye for an eye' is not the law for him. He can never wish to crush or humiliate, for he knows that his enemies, too, are children of God, who has His own purpose for them as for us, the same love for them as for us. The Christian will not want 'conquest'; he will have before his mind through all the struggle a settlement which may give to every nation its full place in the harmony of the universal Church. We entered this war in support of the public law of nations; if our interest was touched, so, we have claimed, was our honour: we have said that we seek no aggrandizement. The so-called 'War on German Trade' may be regarded as part of the military war; to cut off supplies, whether food or the raw material of industry, is a form of siege or investment; but the temper that is shown in its defence, and the intention to retain the markets of Germany after the war, wherever possible, is a form of that same aggressive-

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ness which we regard as the most deplorable feature in the Prussian system.

In everything that he does the Christian will be penitent for his own share in the evil. I have already said that in my own judgement this country was right, was solemnly bound, to declare war when it did. At that moment it was the only right thing for us to do. But why had that moment ever come? Had we done all that was possible to promote peace, and to co-operate with those in Germany—social democrats and others—who were working for peace? We point to the long history of Prussian aggressiveness, to the writings of Nietzsche, Treitschke, and Bernhardi, to the violation of Belgian neutrality. But even if the beam is in Germany's eye and only the mote in ours, we cannot deny that the mote at least is there. And is it only a mote? Our history and position have made us more commercial than military; but in our industrial system we have let loose the spirit of grab and push, the oppression of the weak and the admiration of mere success, as scarcely any other land has done. This is the spirit which, in its military shape, seems to us the evil genius of Prussia. In that shape we must fight it; but we must fight in penitence, and in the resolve to purge it from ourselves in every shape.

Above all, the Christian will pray for his enemies. Either we must rewrite the old words to run, 'Do good to them that hate you, after you have taught them a good lesson; pray for them that persecute you, when they are wounded'—or else we must change our whole attitude

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to our enemies, alike in action and in prayer. Probably if people generally were now called to pray for Germany, very many would suppose that the intention was to pray that her arms might prevail. Yet surely the Germans need our prayers ; the more just the accusations commonly made against them, the greater their need that we should pray for them. Dare we doubt that, if England had real faith, this war could be stopped far sooner through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the warring nations and their rulers in answer to our intercession than by the barren meeting of force with force ? The power of prayer, expressing corporate faith, and directed (as all prayer of faith must be) to the fulfilment not of our will but of God's, is a force which the Church has hardly ever utilized.

III. PROBLEMS RAISED BY THE WAR.

There seems to be hardly any limit to the number of questions regarding our religious life and doctrine as a whole that are raised by this war. It is a challenge to our whole faith. How can we still believe in the Almighty Love of God ? The problem of evil—the one ultimate religious problem—is thrown in our faces in its acutest form, as is perceived by those who regard the war as the final failure of Christianity. But the war only raises that problem more vividly, not more genuinely, than a host of other occurrences.

One great problem which arises is the question whether a State can obey the Christian law at all. Has self-sacrifice any real meaning when applied to communities,

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and if so is it in their case a virtue ? Is there any sense in the phrase ' a self-sacrificing community ' other than that in the phrase ' a community of self-sacrificing individuals ' ? For such a community even the Prussia of Bernhardi certainly is. And if self-sacrifice is right in a nation, is a government to commit the nation to that painful virtue ? In later papers these questions will be pursued. Here our business is to state them and insist on their claim to receive attention.

If the nation is not to follow the Christian law, either because it is inapplicable to States or because the State in question is as yet incapable of rising to it, what is the individual Christian to do ? There are those who hold that he is bound to act in accordance with fundamental Christian principle ; that since Christ refused to employ force, the individual Christian must do likewise ; and that therefore it is impossible for a Christian to take up arms in defence of even an unquestionably just cause. Those who honestly hold these convictions are entitled to the highest respect. The nation could ill do without them. The progress of the world has been due to those who, refusing all compromises, have reached out boldly towards the ideal. The nation would be in danger of losing sight of the heights and depths of the Christian religion if there were not men who were prepared to put Christian principle, as they conceive it, beyond every other consideration, including that of national interest.

The great majority of Christian men, however, feel themselves debarred from taking this position, and doubt

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whether it is the correct interpretation of the Gospel. Christ was founding a spiritual kingdom, and to use physical force would have defeated His whole purpose. But may not force be used to hinder the evil-doer precisely in order that spiritual power may have free course? It is evident that if any large number of our people were to act on the principles which have been mentioned, the power of Great Britain in the present conflict would be so seriously weakened that the issue might go against her. If the nation as a whole were prepared to accept this, having a strong and unwavering faith that God could overrule even this disaster for good, the course of non-resistance would at least be possible. But the nation is not prepared to do this. The war in any case would go on. The only result that could be secured would be the defeat of the cause to which Great Britain is committed. The triumph of that cause Christian people in Great Britain believe to be for the good of the human race. Its defeat would be a triumph of forces inimical to the best interests of humanity. The heroic sacrifices which their countrymen are making would fail of result. These facts, and a sense of their solidarity with the nation, make the majority of Christian men feel it to be their duty to give their utmost support to the nation in the struggle in which it is engaged. In adopting this attitude they do not feel that they are compromising Christian principle. A nation has a real existence. It, as well as the individual, has a contribution to make to the Kingdom of God. The individual cannot live wholly to himself. It does not

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affect the validity of this position that it may be misinterpreted and made to serve base passions.

Nevertheless it does seem to involve us in what I have previously called the entanglement of sin. Perhaps this is one of the great lessons that we are to learn. Only the good tree can bring forth good fruit. It was not possible for England on the 4th of August, nor for any Englishman then or now, to act in full accordance with the mind of Christ. Christ lived the life divine in the midst of a sinful world: that is the miracle. But we cannot. It is not the individual Christian, but the whole Church, that is the body of Christ, the organ of His will; only the completed Church, when there has been brought into it the glory and honour of all the nations, is the perfect organ of His will, the measure of the stature of His fullness. A sinful man *cannot* live the life of Christ; a sinful nation *cannot* perfectly obey His law; and the citizen of a sinful nation *cannot* escape altogether from his nation's sin. No doubt this may be pleaded by base people as an excuse for their baseness; but to the Christian it brings home more than ever the fact that he is tied and bound in a chain which he cannot break. 'Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' For it is the hideous result of sin that it brings us into a choice where even the rightest thing that we can do is something evil; the choice is between the greater and the lesser evil. And though we are right, and absolutely right, in choosing the lesser evil, it is still evil, for it is still not perfect obedience to the holy will of God.

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So at least it seems to one puzzled conscience ; and the way of escape is not through refusing to bear the burden which is laid upon us, but through bearing it in penitence and with prayer for deeper faith.

IV. THE NEED FOR A CATHOLIC CHURCH.

One other question, among very many, must here be raised ; for there seems to be no means of national progress except through the power of some individual citizen to rise above the average level of faith and to lift his fellows with him. To some extent we can do this at this point or that, according to the measure of the gift of Christ. But upon the whole men respond to social influences to a degree that entirely overshadows their capacity for individual achievement, and the power to take a standpoint higher than national, to live by a wider loyalty, is given to few, and to them only in small degree. There is much force in Bernhardi's plea that the national State is the highest actuality, and therefore the supreme object of loyalty ; and though it leads straight to the monstrous doctrine that the State therefore has no obligations (because *ex hypothesi* there is no society of States within which such obligation may operate), we have nothing to oppose to it but a Kingdom of Heaven which is not on earth, which is an ideal and not a fact (at least on the historical plane), and a Church which is neither One, nor Catholic, nor Holy.

What we need is an international society, actually and perceptibly one, bound together by devotion to Christ.

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If there were such a society in the world, the individual Christian would feel his membership of it in the same way as he feels his membership of his nation. Loyalty to it would not be an effort which many good men despise as Utopian, and which is paralysed by his own lurking doubt of its value. Such a society, by binding its members to itself, while leaving them still fully citizens of their own countries, would aid enormously their desire to rise a little nearer to the ideal of Christ and draw their country with them.

A suggestion once made, half in jest, that we should add certain words to the Creed, and say, 'I believe in the Holy Catholic Church and regret that it does not exist,' comes very near the heart of our problems. All the horror of this time is a new spur to those who are labouring for the unity of Christendom.

Once there was such a society. The old Papacy, as its greatest upholders conceived it, was the noblest ideal by which men generally have ever tried to act—the loftiest in aspiration and the firmest-rooted in reasoning. But with the reckless idealism that is the glory and the failure of the Middle Ages, it tried to reach its goal by a short cut. It used the world's methods for God's purpose. So it failed. But if the wild Europe of that day could even for a time acknowledge the ideal of a divine society transcending national divisions, we have hope that such a society might be built again, with all the deeper understanding that the centuries have brought.

There is our hope. Peace in the sense of an absence of

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war may be secured by commercial or financial interests for a time. But war may be nobler than such peace, as the tie of nationality is more honourable than that of a trading company. The only true peace for the world, the peace which is the twin of love and joy, the peace which is the gift of the Spirit, must consist in the recognition of all nations and races as parts of the one Kingdom of God realized on earth.

This war, therefore, challenges the Christian alike to thought, to penitence, to action. The present paper has only sketched the problems; others will guide us towards their solution. And as we labour at our perplexities we shall often disagree, through seeing the truth so imperfectly.

But all Christians can unite, with little difference of opinion, in the policy which the hour requires. The task of the Christian Church is clear. It must strain every nerve to ensure that in the conduct of the war Christian standards of honour, generosity, and love for our enemies are not forgotten; that the settlement, when it comes, should be in accordance with the Christian postulate that all nations are needed for the building up of the Kingdom of God; and that our own country, whether in defeat or in the more searching test of victory, should open its heart and mind to learn the lessons which God can teach it, and should go forward into the future which He appoints knowing that its supreme mission is to discover and to do His will.